

## Downloadable Articles

# "The Jesus of the New Age Movement"

## Part Two in a Two-Part Series on New Age Christology

by Ron Rhodes

In her best-selling book, *Out on a Limb*, Shirley MacLaine recounts how a friend once said to her: "You know that nothing is recorded in the Bible about Christ from the time he was about twelve until he began to really teach at about thirty years old. Right?" "Yes," MacLaine replied, "I had heard about that and I just figured he didn't have much to say until he got older." "Well, no," her friend responded, "a lot of people think that those eighteen missing years were spent traveling in and around India and Tibet and Persia and the Near East. They say he became an adept yogi and mastered complete control over his body and the physical world around him[he] tried to teach people that they could do the same things too if they got more in touch with their spiritual selves and their own potential power." [1]

Did Jesus travel to the East to study under gurus? Did He become "the Christ" as a result of what He learned and accomplished there? Are there mystical "gospels" that have been suppressed by the church, keeping us from knowing the real Jesus? In this article, we will look at these and other important questions related to the Jesus of the New Age movement. We begin by examining the claims of a controversial Russian writer.

### THE LIFE OF SAINT ISSA

As the story goes, in 1887, Nicolas Notovitch - a Russian war correspondent - went on a journey through India. While en route to Leh, the capital of Ladakh (in Northern India along the Tibetan border), he heard a Tibetan lama (i.e., monk) in a monastery refer to a grand lama named Issa (the Tibetan form of "Jesus"). Notovitch inquired further, and discovered that a chronicle of the life of Issa existed with other sacred scrolls at the Convent of Himis (about 25 miles from Leh).

Notovitch visited this convent and was told by the chief lama that a scroll did in fact exist which provided details about the Prophet Issa. This holy man allegedly preached the same doctrines in Israel as he earlier did in India. The original scroll, the lama said, was written in the Pali language and later translated into Tibetan. The Convent of Himis possessed the Tibetan translation, while the original was said to be in the library of Lhasa (the traditional capital of Tibet).

Notovitch eventually persuaded the lama to read the scroll to him, and had it translated from Tibetan by an interpreter. According to Notovitch, the literal translation of the scroll was "disconnected and mingled with accounts of other contemporaneous events to which they bear no relation," and so he took the liberty to arrange "all the fragments concerning the life of Issa in chronological order and [took] pains to impress upon them the character of unity, in which they were absolutely lacking." [2] He went without sleep for many nights so he could order and remodel what he had heard.

From the scroll, Notovitch learned that "Jesus had wandered to India and to Tibet as a young man before he began his work in Palestine." [3] The beginning of Jesus' alleged journey is described in the scroll this way:

When Issa had attained the age of thirteen years, the epoch when an Israelite should take a wife, the house where his parents earned their living began to be a place of meeting for rich and noble people, desirous of having for a son-in-law the young Issa, already famous for his edifying discourses in the name of the almighty. Then it was that Issa left the parental house in secret, departed from Jerusalem, and with the merchants set out towards Sind, with the object of perfecting himself in the Divine Word and of studying the laws of the great Buddhas. [4]

According to Notovitch, the scroll proceeds to explain how, after briefly visiting with the Jains, young Issa studied for six years among the Brahmins at Juggernaut, Rajagriha, Benares, and other Indian holy cities. The priests of Brahma "taught him to read and understand the Vedas, to cure by aid of prayer, to teach, to explain the holy scriptures to the people, and to drive out evil spirits from the bodies of men, restoring unto them their sanity." [5]

While there, the story continues, Issa sought to teach the scriptures to all the people of India - including the lower castes. The Brahmins and Kshatriyas (higher castes) opposed him in this, and told him that the Sudras (a lower caste) were forbidden to read or even contemplate the Vedas. Issa denounced them severely for this.

Because of Issa's controversial teachings, a death plot was devised against him. But the Sudras warned him and he left Juggernaut, establishing himself in Gautamides (the birthplace of the Buddha Sakyamuni) where he studied the sacred writings of the Sutras. "Six years after, Issa, whom the Buddha had elected to spread his holy word, had become a perfect expositor of the sacred writings. Then he left Nepal and the Himalayan mountains, descended into the valley of Rajputana, and went towards the west, preaching to diverse peoples the supreme perfection of man." [6] Following this, we are told, Issa briefly visited Persia where he preached to

the Zoroastrians. Then, at 29, he returned to Israel and began to preach all that he had learned.

According to Notovitch's "scroll," by the end of Issa's three-year ministry, Pilate had become so alarmed at his mushrooming popularity that he ordered one of his spies to accuse him falsely. Issa was then imprisoned and tortured by soldiers to force a confession which would permit his being executed. The Jewish priests tried to act in Issa's behalf, but to no avail. Issa was falsely accused and Pilate ordered the death sentence:

At sunset the sufferings of Issa came to an end. He lost consciousness, and the soul of this just man left his body to become absorbed in the Divinity. Meanwhile, Pilate became afraid of his action and gave the body of the saint to his parents, who buried it near the spot of his execution. Three days after, the governor sent his soldiers to carry away the body of Issa to bury it elsewhere, fearing otherwise a popular insurrection. The next day the crowd found the tomb open and empty. At once the rumor spread that the supreme Judge had sent his angels to carry away the mortal remains of the saint in whom dwelt on earth a part of the Divine Spirit.[7]

Following this, some merchants in Palestine allegedly traveled to India, came upon some people who had known Issa as a casual student of Sanskrit and Pali during his youth in India, and filled them in on Issa's demise at the hands of Pilate. And, as the story concludes, The Life of Saint Issa was written on a scroll - author(s) unknown - three or four years later.

## Reactions to Notovitch

This alleged manuscript generated a number of lively responses. Let us briefly look at a sampling of these.

**F. Max Muller.** In October 1894, preeminent Orientalist Max Muller of Oxford University (who himself was an advocate of Eastern philosophy and therefore could not be accused of having a Christian bias) published a refutation of Notovitch in *The Nineteenth Century*, a scholarly review. Four of his arguments are noteworthy: (1) Muller asserted that an old document like the one Notovitch allegedly found would have been included in the *Kandjur* and *Tandjur* (catalogues in which all Tibetan literature is supposed to be listed). (2) He rejected Notovitch's account of the origin of the book. He asked how Jewish merchants happened, among the millions of India, to meet the very people who had known Issa as a student, and still more "how those who had known Issa as a simple student in India saw at once that he was the same person who had been put to death under Pontius Pilate." [8] (3) Muller cites a woman who had visited the monastery of Himis and made inquiries about Notovitch. According to a letter she wrote (dated June 29, 1894), "there is not a single word of truth in the whole story! There has been no Russian here. There is no life of Christ there at all!" [9] And (4) Muller questioned the great liberty Notovitch took in editing and arranging the alleged verses. Muller said this is something no reputable scholar would have done.

Notovitch promptly responded to Muller's arguments in the preface to the London edition of *The Life of Saint Issa* which was published the following year (1895). But his response did little to satisfy his critics. He said: (1) The verses which were found would not be in any catalogues because "they are to be found scattered through more than one book without any title." [10] (But in his first preface he said the Convent of Himis contained "a few copies of the manuscript in question." [11]) (2) Regarding the unlikelihood of Jewish merchants encountering those who knew Issa as a child in India, Notovitch said "they were not Jewish but Indian merchants who happened to witness the crucifixion prior to returning home from Palestine." [12] (Even so, it would still be unlikely that - among the millions in India - the merchants would come upon the precise people who knew Issa as a child.) (3) As for editing and arranging the verses in *The Life of Saint Issa*, Notovitch said that the same kind of editing was done with the *Iliad* and no one ever questioned that. (But how does this legitimize Notovitch's *modus operandi*?) (4) As to the refusal by the lama of Himis to affirmatively answer questions about the manuscript (as he apparently did with the lady who wrote Muller), Notovitch says this was because "Orientals are in the habit of looking upon Europeans as robbers who introduce themselves in their midst to despoil them in the name of civilization." [13] Notovitch succeeded only "because I made use of the Eastern diplomacy which I had learnt in my travels." [14] (This was a convenient rationalization, for Notovitch could always point to a lack of "Eastern diplomacy" on the part of a European challenger whenever a monk refused to corroborate the Issa legend.)

Assuming (wrongly) that his response to Muller laid criticism of his work to rest, Notovitch suggested that in the future his critics restrict themselves solely to the question: "Did those passages exist in the monastery of Himis, and have I faithfully reproduced their substance?" [15]

**J. Archibald Douglas.** J. Archibald Douglas, Professor at Government College in Agra, India, took a three-month vacation from the college and retraced Notovitch's steps at the Himis monastery. He published an account of his journey in *The Nineteenth Century* (June 1895), the bulk of which reproduced an interview with the chief lama of the monastery. The lama said he had been chief lama for 15 years, which means he would have been the chief lama during Notovitch's alleged visit. The lama asserted that during these 15 years, no European with a broken leg had ever sought refuge at the monastery.

When asked if he was aware of any book in any Buddhist monastery in Tibet pertaining to the life of Issa, he said: "I have never heard of [a manuscript] which mentions the name of Issa, and it is my firm and honest belief that none such exists. I have inquired of our principal Lamas in other monasteries of Tibet, and they are not acquainted with any books or manuscripts which mention the name of Issa." [16] When portions of Notovitch's book were read to the lama, he responded, "Lies, lies, lies, nothing but lies!" [17]

The interview was written down and witnessed by the lama, Douglas, and the interpreter, and on June 3, 1895, was stamped with the official seal of the lama. The credibility of The Life of Saint Issa was unquestionably damaged by Douglas's investigation.

Nicholas Roerich. In The Lost Years of Jesus, Elizabeth Clare Prophet documents other supporters of Notovitch's work, the most prominent of which was Nicholas Roerich. Roerich - a Theosophist - claimed that from 1924 to 1928 he traveled throughout Central Asia and discovered that legends about Issa were widespread. In his book, Himalaya, he makes reference to "writings" and "manuscripts" about Issa - some of which he claims to have seen and others about which people told him. Roerich allegedly recorded independently in his own travel diary the same legend of Issa that Notovitch had seen earlier.

Per Beskow - author of Strange Tales About Jesus - responded to Roerich's work by suggesting that he leaned heavily on two previous "Jesus goes East" advocates: "The first part of his account is taken literally from Notovitch's Life of Saint Issa, chapters 5-13 (only extracts but with all the verses in the right order). It is followed by 'another version' (pages 93-94), taken from chapter 16 of Dowling's Aquarian Gospel." [18] (We will consider the Aquarian Gospel shortly.)

**Edgar J. Goodspeed.** Notovitch's The Life of Saint Issa refused to die; it was republished in New York in 1926. This motivated Edgar J. Goodspeed, Professor at the University of Chicago, to publish a Christian response. He commented that "it is worthwhile to call attention to [The Life of Saint Issa] because its republication in New York in 1926 was hailed by the press as a new and important discovery," [19] even though first published over thirty years earlier (1894).

Three of Goodspeed's arguments are noteworthy. (1) Goodspeed suggests a literary dependency of The Life of Saint Issa on Matthew, Luke, Acts, and Romans. This would not be odd except that The Life of Saint Issa was allegedly written three or four years after the death of Christ, whereas Matthew, Luke, Acts, and Romans were written two or three decades later. An example of this dependency relates to how The Life of Saint Issa attempts to fill in the silent years of Jesus between the ages of twelve and thirty: "these two ages are taken for granted by the author of this work, who unconsciously bases his scheme upon them. We know them from the Gospel of Luke alone, and the question arises: 'Has the author of Issa obtained them from the same source?'" [20]

(2) Notovitch describes Luke as saying that Jesus "was in the desert until the day of his showing unto Israel." This, Notovitch says, "conclusively proves that no one knew where the young man had gone, to so suddenly reappear sixteen years later." But, says Goodspeed, "it is not of Jesus but of John that Luke says this (1:80), so that it will hardly yield the conclusive proof Notovitch seeks. At this point in Luke's narrative, in fact, Jesus has not yet appeared." [21]

(3) Goodspeed comments that The Life of Saint Issa does not purport to have been deciphered and translated by a competent scholar: "The lama read, the interpreter translated, Notovitch took notes. He could evidently not control either the lama or the interpreter, to make sure of what the Tibetan manuscripts contained." [22]

Throughout the twentieth century, many individuals have responded positively to the work of Notovitch, including Janet and Richard Bock (makers of the film, "The Lost Years of Jesus"), Swami Abhedananda, Sai Baba, Paramahansa Yogananda of the Self-Realization Fellowship, and Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. Evidence abounds that the Issa legend is alive and well today.

Max Muller, J. Archibald Douglas, and Edgar J. Goodspeed have all presented solid refutations of the legend. These should challenge any serious Issa advocate to reevaluate his or her position. I shall offer further arguments later. But first, it is necessary to examine additional features in the New Age profile of Jesus.

## THE AQUARIAN GOSPEL OF JESUS THE CHRIST

Another major source for the New Age Jesus is The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ, written by Civil War army chaplain Levi Dowling (1844-1911). The title page of this "gospel" bears the words: "Transcribed from the Book of God's Remembrances, known as the Akashic Records." (Occultists believe the physical earth is surrounded by an immense spiritual field known as "Akasha" in which is impressed every impulse of human thought, will, and emotion. It is therefore believed to constitute a complete record of human history.) Hence, unlike Notovitch whose conclusions were based on an alleged objective ancient document, Levi's book is based on an occult form of subjective (nonverifiable) illumination.

The bulk of Levi's gospel, first published in 1911, focuses on the education and travels of Jesus. After studying with Rabbi Hillel (a Jewish scholar), Jesus allegedly traveled to India where he spent years studying among the Brahmins and Buddhists.

Jesus supposedly became interested in studying in the East after Joseph (Jesus' father) hosted Prince Ravanna from India. During his visit, Ravanna asked "that he might be the patron of the child; might take him to the East where he could learn the wisdom of the Brahms. And Jesus longed to go that he might learn: and after many days his parents gave consent." So "Jesus was accepted as a pupil in the temple Jagannath; and here he learned the Vedas and the Manic laws." [23]

Jesus then visited the city of Benares of the Ganges. While there, "Jesus sought to learn the Hindu art of healing, and became the pupil of Udraka, greatest of the Hindu healers." [24] And Jesus "remained with Udraka until he had learned from him all there was to be learned of the Hindu art of healing." [25]

Levi proceeds to chronicle a visit to Tibet, where Jesus allegedly met Meng-ste, the greatest sage of the East: "And Jesus had access to all the sacred manuscripts, and, with the help of Meng-ste, read them all." [26]

Jesus eventually arrived in Egypt, and - in what must be considered a climax of this account of the "lost years" - he joined the "Sacred Brotherhood" at Heliopolis. While there, he passed through seven degrees of initiation - Sincerity, Justice, Faith, Philanthropy, Heroism, Love Divine, and THE CHRIST. The Aquarian Gospel records the bestowal of this highest degree: "The hierophant arose and said, upon your brow I place this diadem, and in the Great Lodge of the heavens and earth you are THE CHRIST. You are a neophyte no more; but God himself will speak, and will confirm your title and degree. And then a voice that shook the very temple said, THIS IS THE CHRIST; and every living creature said, AMEN." [27]

Later, following his three-year ministry as THE CHRIST and his subsequent death, Jesus' resurrection is described by Levi in terms of a "transmutation" which all men may accomplish. He made many appearances to people all over the world to substantiate this transmutation. For example, he appeared to the "Silent Brotherhood" in Greece and said: "What I can do all men can do. Go preach the gospel of the omnipotence of man." [28]

## THE READINGS OF EDGAR CAYCE

Like Levi, Edgar Cayce claimed the ability to read the Akashic Record while in a trance. During his life, he gave over 16,000 readings, 5,000 of which deal with religious matters. It was from the Akashic Record that Cayce set forth an elaborate explanation of the early years of Jesus.

The person we know as Jesus, Cayce tells us, had 29 previous incarnations: "These included an early sun worshipper, the author of the Book of the Dead, and Hermes, who was supposedly the architect of the Great Pyramid. Jesus was also Zend (the father of Zoroaster), Amilius (an Atlantean) and other figures of ancient history." [29] Other incarnations include Adam, Joseph, Joshua, Enoch, and Melchizedek.

This particular soul did not become "the Christ" until the thirtieth incarnation - as Jesus of Nazareth. The reason Jesus had to go through so many incarnations is that he - like all other human beings - had "karmic debt" (sin) to work off.

Jesus received a comprehensive education. Prior to his twelfth year, he attained a thorough knowledge of the Jewish law. "From his twelfth to his fifteenth or sixteenth year he was taught the prophecies by Judy [an Essene teacher] in her home at Carmel. Then began his education abroad. He was sent first again into Egypt for only a short period, then into India for three years, then into that later called Persia. From Persia he was called to Judea at the death of Joseph, then went into Egypt for the completion of his preparation as a teacher." [30] During his alleged studies abroad, Jesus studied under many teachers (including Kahjian in India, Junner in Persia, and Zar in Egypt), and learned healing, weather control, telepathy, astrology, and other psychic arts. When his education was complete, he went back to his homeland where he performed "miracles" and taught the multitudes for three years.

## JESUS THE CHRIST AND HIS TEACHINGS

There are many differing views regarding how Jesus attained "Christhood." As we have seen, Levi said Jesus went through seven degrees of initiation, the seventh being THE CHRIST. Cayce said Jesus became "the Christ" in the thirtieth incarnation. Many modern New Agers say the human Jesus merely "attuned" to the cosmic Christ, or achieved at-one-ment with the Christ by raising his own "Christ-consciousness." But, however, Jesus attained "Christhood," New Agers agree that he was a teacher par excellence of New Age "truths."

New Agers generally do one of two things with the teachings of Jesus. Some merely reinterpret the gospel sayings of Jesus to make it appear that Jesus was actually teaching New Age "truth." Others add that long-lost (New Age) sayings of Jesus have been rediscovered. These "rediscovered" sayings can have one of two sources: reputed ancient extracanonical writings (like the "Gnostic gospels" which were allegedly suppressed by the early church and rediscovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945) and the Akashic Record. Let us now consider samplings of each of these.

The Gospel Sayings of Jesus. According to New Agers, we must all seek first the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 6:33), recognizing that the "kingdom" has reference to our inner divinity. [31] For indeed, Jesus said "Ye are gods" (John 10:34). The parable about those who foolishly build a house on sand (Matt. 7:24-27) teaches us that those who fail to recognize their divinity will not be able to stand against the storms of life. [32] But if we come unto Jesus, we will find rest, for his yoke (i.e., yoga) is easy and his burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30). [33]

"Newly Discovered" Sayings from Extracanonical Sources. Jesus taught a form of pantheism according to The Life of Saint Issa, for he said that "the Eternal Spirit [God] is the soul of all that is animate." [34] He also taught that all humans have unlimited potential: "I came to show human possibilities; that which I am, all men will

be."[35] And, according to the Gnostic gospels, Jesus spoke of "illusion and enlightenment, not of sin and repentance." [36] Indeed, man can save himself: "If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you." [37]

"Newly Discovered" Sayings from the Akashic Record. According to Levi's Aquarian Gospel, Jesus was just a way-shower: "And all the people were entranced, and would have worshipped Jesus as God; but Jesus said, I am your brother man just come to show the way to God; you shall not worship man." [38] Jesus also taught pantheism and monism: "The universal God is one, yet he is more than one [i.e., he takes many forms]; all things are God; all things are one." [39] Jesus also tells us that "the nations of the earth see God from different points of view, and so he does not seem the same to every one." [40]

## THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

A Christian response to the New Age rendition of Jesus may begin with the observation that the accounts of Jesus going East have irreconcilable contradictions. This fact alone should make any objective investigator suspicious of the reliability of these documents.

Each of the accounts differ, for example, regarding the beginning of Jesus' trek. The Life of Saint Issa portrays Jesus departing secretly from his parent's house with some merchants on their way to India so he could perfect himself by studying the laws of the great Buddhas. Levi's Aquarian Gospel depicts Prince Ravanna from India asking Jesus' parents if he can escort Jesus to India where he can learn Indian wisdom. Cayce's reading of the Akashic Record has an Essene teacher sending Jesus to India to study astrology and other psychic disciplines.

What is particularly revealing is that both Cayce and Levi allegedly obtained their "revelations" by reading the Akashic Record, yet their readings blatantly contradict each other. Since both Cayce and Levi are highly respected in New Age circles, how do New Agers account for the obvious failure of at least one of them to properly "read" the Akashic Record? Furthermore, if one of these top-rated New Age seers cannot be trusted, which one can be?

Not only do the accounts disagree with each other, they all disagree with the gospel accounts in the New Testament. And the New Testament has solid, irrefutable manuscript evidence - something that should be considered by those wanting to replace it so easily with Gnostic gospels or alleged ancient manuscripts claiming that Jesus went East.

The New Testament gospels are based on eyewitness testimony. Moreover, they were written very close to the time of the events which they report. It is crucial to recognize that the four canonical gospels are all dated much earlier than the Gnostic gospels. The earliest Gnostic gospels date from A.D. 150 to 200. The New Testament gospels date from A.D. 60 to 100 - approximately one century earlier. Clearly, the New Testament gospels are the authentic and reliable source for information on the life and teachings of Jesus.

On the other hand, all of the "Jesus goes East" accounts contain historical inaccuracies, several of which have already been mentioned. Other examples include: (1) Levi's Aquarian Gospel said Herod Antipas was ruler in Jerusalem. Antipas, however, never ruled in Jerusalem but in Galilee. Dowling meant to say Herod the Great. This is especially significant since Levi's transcriptions are claimed to be "true to the letter" in the introduction of his Aquarian Gospel! [41] (2) Levi's reference to Jesus visiting with Meng-ste was probably meant to be the great Chinese sage, Meng-tse (tse, not ste). Dowling apparently didn't realize, however, that Meng-tse died in 289 B.C.

The deeper one probes, the clearer it becomes that the Jesus of the New Age movement lacks any basis in history. To many, The Life of Saint Issa appeared to provide this. However, the world still awaits bona fide hard evidence that can be physically examined by all interested parties. Even a photograph would be helpful. But as Notovitch lamented: "During my journey I took a considerable number of very curious photographs, but when on arrival at Bombay I examined the negatives, I found they had all become obliterated." [42] I don't want to be cynical, but

In order to find a New Age Jesus in authentic documents, New Agers are forced to deal with the language of the New Testament in a manipulative fashion. Tal Brooke comments: "It is a little like the problem of the Marxist who wishes to change the common understanding of the United States Constitution so that a gradualist skewing of word meaning can enable a socialistic interpretation of words whose intended meanings in the original were clearly different." [43]

Though the New Testament does not directly address this issue, there are strong indirect evidences that Jesus never traveled East for eighteen years. First, Jesus was well-known as a carpenter (Mark 6:3) and as a carpenter's son (Matt. 13:55). That His carpentry played a large role in His life up to the time of His ministry is clear from the fact that some of His parables and teachings drew upon His experience as a carpenter (e.g., building a house on rock as opposed to sand, Matt. 7:24-27). Moreover, the people in and around Nazareth displayed familiarity with Jesus, as if they had had regular contact with Him for a prolonged time. At the beginning of His three-year ministry, Jesus "went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read" (Luke 4:16). After He finished reading, "all spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. Isn't

this Joseph's son?' they asked" (Luke 4:22). This implies that those in the synagogue regarded Jesus as a local resident.

It is important to note that when Jesus stood up to read, He did so from the Old Testament Scriptures. And the Old Testament - for which Jesus often displayed reverence (cf. Matt. 5:18) - (1) contains numerous warnings and admonitions about staying away from false gods and false religious systems (cf. Exod. 20:2; 34:14; Deut. 6:14; 13:10; 2 Kings 17:35); (2) clearly distinguishes between the creation and the Creator, unlike Eastern thought; and (3) taught the need for redemption, not gnosis (knowledge). It is no coincidence that Jesus is often seen quoting from the Old Testament in the gospels, but not once does He quote from (or even mention) the Vedas!

While some in Nazareth were impressed at the graciousness of Jesus' words, others were offended that He was attracting so much attention. They seemed to be treating Him with a contempt born of familiarity. We read in Matthew 13:54-57: "Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. 'Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?...Where then did this man get all these things?' And they took offense at him."

Among those that became angriest at Jesus were the Jewish leaders. They accused Him of many offenses, including breaking the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-14), blasphemy (John 8:58-59; 10:31-33), and doing miracles in Satan's power (Matt. 12:24). But they never accused Him of teaching or practicing anything learned in the East. The Jews considered such teachings and practices to be idolatry and sorcery. Had Jesus actually gone to the East to study under "the great Buddhas," this would have been excellent grounds for discrediting and disqualifying Him regarding His claim to be the promised Jewish Messiah.

It is noteworthy that the self-concept of the New Age Jesus is that he is just a man who became enlightened in the East, eventually achieving Christhood. The self-concept of the New Testament Jesus, however, is one in which He singles Himself out as God (cf. John 8:58).

It is understandable why the "Jesus who went East" refused to accept worship (cf. Dowling). The New Testament Jesus, by contrast, accepted worship on numerous occasions because He knew Himself to be the one and only God (note especially Matthew 28:17). Of course, only God can be worshiped (cf. Ex. 20:4-5; Deut. 6:4-5, 13). It is thus significant that even when Jesus was just a babe, the Magi (from the East) "fell down and worshiped Him" (Matt. 2:11).

The final word on this matter must belong to God the Father, for there is no higher authority in the universe. He Himself is quoted as saying to Jesus: "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever" (Heb. 1:8). It is Jesus - the second Person of the Trinity - that we as Christians look forward to seeing; 'we wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ' (Titus 2:13). And, as Christians, we exult in the truth that Jesus has a name that is above every name, and that at His name, every knee will bow - in heaven and on earth and under the earth (Phil. 2:9-10).

## A CLOSING REFLECTION

What if - despite all the arguments presented above - a manuscript should one day surface in India which speaks of Issa? Would this prove that Jesus did in fact go East during His youth?

Christians acknowledge that news of Jesus eventually reached India and Tibet as a result of the missionary efforts of the early church. It is conceivable that when devotees of other religions heard about Jesus, they tried to modify what they heard to make it appear that Jesus and His teachings were compatible with their own belief systems. It is possible that - sometime between the first and nineteenth centuries - these unreliable legends were recorded on scrolls and circulated among the convents in India. This would not be unlike the distorted versions of the life of Jesus that emerged among the early Gnostics (and recorded in the Gnostic gospels).

But for such a manuscript to be convincing, it would have to have the same kind of irrefutable manuscript evidence as the New Testament, the same quality of eyewitness testimony, and be written very close to the events on which they report like the New Testament. Until such an authoritative document surfaces, is it wise to base one's eternal destiny on a manuscript that has as little evidential support as Notovich's?

Douglas Groothuis issues this challenge: "Should any supposed record of Jesus' life come to the fore, let it marshal its historical merits in competition with holy writ. The competitors have an uphill battle against the incumbent."<sup>[44]</sup>

## NOTES

1 Shirley MacLaine, *Out on a Limb* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 233-34.

2 Nicolas Notovitch, *The Life of Saint Issa*, cited by Joseph Gaer, *The Lore of the New Testament* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1952), 118.

- 3 Nicolas Notovitch, cited by Per Beskow, *Strange Tales About Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, n.d.), 59.
- 4 Nicolas Notovitch, ed. *The Life of Saint Issa*, in Elizabeth Clare Prophet, *The Lost Years of Jesus* (Livingston, MT: Summit University Press, 1987), 218.
- 5 Ibid., 219.
- 6 Ibid., 222-23.
- 7 Ibid., 245-46.
- 8 Max Muller, "The Alleged Sojourn of Christ in India," *The Nineteenth Century* 36 (1894):515f., cited by Edgar J. Goodspeed, *Modern Apocrypha* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956, 10.
- 9 Ibid., 11.
- 10 Notovitch, cited by Goodspeed, 11.
- 11 Ibid., 11-12.
- 12 Notovich, in Prophet, *Lost Years*, 30.
- 13 Ibid., 103.
- 14 Ibid., 103.
- 15 Ibid., 108.
- 16 J. Archibald Douglas, "The Chief Lama of Himis on the Alleged 'Unknown Life of Christ'" *The Nineteenth Century* (April 1896) 667-77, cited by Prophet, 36-37.
- 17 Goodspeed, 13.
- 18 Beskow, 62.
- 19 Goodspeed, 14 emphasis added.
- 20 Ibid., 5.
- 21 Ibid., 9.
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- 23 Levi, *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* (London: L. N. Fowler & Co., 1947), 48.
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41 Levi, *Aquarian Gospel*, 12.

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## Glossary of Key Terms

**Caste.** A term applied to the social groups in India which rank in a hierarchical order. The four primary castes - from highest to lowest - are: Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (peasants), and Sudras (unskilled laborers).

**Cosmic Christ.** Variouslly defined, but always seen as divine. Many New Agers speak of him (it) as a universal, impersonal entity who - among other things - indwelt the body of the human Jesus for three years (from his baptism to his crucifixion).

**Jains.** Followers of Jainism. Jainism is a religious system of India that arose in the sixth century B.C. in protest against the ritualism of Hinduism and the authority of the Vedas. Jains are rigidly ascetic, believing in a strict control of wrong thought and action as a means of escaping from the transmigration of the soul (rebirth) that results from one's past actions (karma).

**Monism.** A metaphysical theory which sees all reality as a unified whole. Everything is seen as being composed of the same substance.

**Sutras.** Collections of aphorisms (or proverbs) which highlight the teachings of the Vedas and Upanishads (Indian scriptures).

**Vedas.** The oldest and most sacred scriptures of Hinduism. (The word veda means "sacred knowledge.")

**Zoroastrians.** Followers of Zoroastrianism, a Persian religion founded by Zoroaster (c. 628 B.C.-c. 551 B.C.). Zoroastrianism is an ethical religion which espouses an ongoing struggle between two primal spirits: Ahura Mazda (the good spirit), and Angra Mainyu (the evil spirit). Ahura Mazda will ultimately triumph.

Note: Additional technical terms used in this article are defined within the text. -

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